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UNCLAS MANAMA 000691

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [SENV](#) [TBIO](#) [BA](#) [KSCI](#)

SUBJECT: SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL ESTH HUB IN OMAN

REF: 04 MUSCAT 274

1. Embassy Manama strongly supports the establishment of a regional Environment, Science, Technology, and Health (ESTH) hub in Oman to support ESTH efforts in Bahrain and the greater Gulf region. Embassy ESTH officer is the post's sole economic/commercial officer, and has a full plate of issues (e.g. FTA implementation, MEPI programming, and economic reporting). An ESTH officer dedicated to Gulf environmental issues would provide much needed support to Embassy ESTH efforts.

2. Director of Environmental Assessment and Planning Zahwah Al Kuwari told EconOff May 9 that ESTH priorities in Bahrain are (1) health policies in relation to sustainable development, (2) water resources, and (3) defining the value of environmental parameters for economic growth. She noted that Bahrain's first environmental law was passed in 1996 and much work is needed in the areas of education, awareness, and enforcement. The experience and expertise of a regional hub office located in the Gulf could greatly assist Bahrain with its environmental needs as well as encourage greater regional cooperation in these areas.

3. Health and Sustainable Development: Al Kawari said Bahraini decision makers do not take health considerations into account when developing policies for sustainable development. This can be seen, she said, in a recent case of residents of a village being harmed by gas emissions from a nearby industrial plant. She said Bahrain needs to create a statistical database that links health with the environment. Bahrain also has one of the highest percentages of diabetes around the world. Joslin Diabetes center (affiliate of Harvard Medical Center) has a center in Manama. There is a need for additional research in this area.

4. Water Resources: Al Kawari said Bahrainis are surrounded by water on all sides and believe they do not have to concern themselves with water consumption, as long as the desalination plants are running. She said the population needs to be educated on water use and water conservation. Bahrain is also aggressively reclaiming land with estimates of 12-50 percent total land mass growth. The native ecological systems now face severe distress due to these efforts.

5. Value of Environmental Perimeters: Al Kawari noted that Bahrain does not have a system to account for the value of environmental parameters when calculating economic growth and development. It is just not thought of, she said. Bahrain needs technical assistance to better estimate environmental factors in evaluating a project's costs and benefits.

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